

# EDITORIALS

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## Progress in Clinical Nutrition

THIS SPECIAL ISSUE OF THE WESTERN JOURNAL OF MEDICINE focuses on recent progress in clinical nutrition. It appears appropriately at a time of growing public and professional interest in this important topic, which most agree has received less attention than it should over the past several decades. The articles in this issue draw attention to a number of areas where there have been fascinating advances of considerable clinical significance, advances of which practitioners, students and even researchers in medicine should be aware. They are evidence that nutrition in humans is coming into its own as an integral part of modern medicine and its armamentarium.

While progress such as that reported in this issue is important and essential for the diagnosis and treatment of clinical abnormalities related to nutrition, it does not yet answer many of the burning questions of the day with respect to such things as carcinogens and other toxins in the food chain, or whether some kind of basic alteration in the diet of Americans will make a significant difference in the wellness and longevity of the citizenry. One senses that we are only at the threshold of what will come to be our knowledge of such subjects and that in the meantime it may be premature to embark on attempting to redesign our national eating habits. Until more of the facts are in hand clinical nutrition should be given an important place in biomedical research, and even now it should be given a much stronger place in medical education at every level.

—MSMW

## The Nutritional Status of Patients With Cancer

ELSEWHERE IN THIS ISSUE is an article by Drasin and associates on nutritional maintenance in patients with cancer.

Recognition of malnutrition as a complication of oncologic therapy is occurring more frequently, probably because better methods of enteral and

parenteral nutritional rehabilitation are now available. Certain medical and paramedical groups such as head and neck surgeons and dietitians always have been quite cognizant of the importance of nutritional support before, during and after cancer treatment and have taken advantage of the available methods to do so. With the introduction of intravenous hyperalimentation (IVH) as a means of total parenteral nutrition and with the often dramatic results obtained with its use, emphasis on nutrition in almost every field of medicine now exists. Pharmaceutical companies have noted rapidly escalating sales of previously ignored nutritional products, and the rush is now on for them to manufacture cheaper and more effective parenteral products and similar enteral products that are also more palatable.

Practical aspects of nutritional management are being taught in medical schools today and, at least in our school, students are literally clamoring to learn the proper techniques of administering IVH and enteral nutritional supplements. Students are graduating from medical schools with knowledge of the "state of the art" in the field of nutrition and, it is hoped, will demand that the nutritional sciences keep abreast in the area of developmental research. Those of us who are older often must relearn the nutritional biochemistry, physiology and pharmacology taught us in medical schools some years ago and must learn for the first time about the newer parenteral and enteral nutritional rehabilitative techniques. Complications from surgical operations, radiation therapy and chemotherapy are fewer and less severe in well nourished patients than in malnourished ones. The therapeutic margin of safety in malnourished patients is very narrow. Response to chemotherapy appears to be enhanced by a good nutritional status. Leukotactic activity and immunocompetence are restored by nutritionally rehabilitating a malnourished patient, and host repletion occurs as opposed to any observed stimulation of tumor growth. Therefore, it would behoove practicing oncologists to be familiar with the available methods of nutritional maintenance and rehabilitation.

The article by Drasin and his associates is an important addition to the literature, not only